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SUBJECT: CZECH COMMENTS IN ADVANCE OF THE EU GAERC

REF: STATE

11. (SBU) Summary: Emboff met with Vaclav Balek, Director of the Czech MFA Department of Common Foreign and Security Policy prior to the December 10 EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). Of note were his comments on: Iran, Israel, Kosovo, Burma, Chad and European Neighborhood Policy.

Iran - EU Sanctions Unlikely Now

12. (SBU) According to Balek, given the information contained in the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), it is unlikely that the EU Foreign Ministers will adopt EU sanctions at the December 10 GAERC. Balek indicated that this reluctance has several causes - while some EU member states question the efficacy of EU sanctions against Iran, others remain reluctant to jeopardize economic ties with Iran, and still others question whether sanctions are appropriate given Iran has suspended "weaponization." Thus, Balek anticipates that certain EU member states will press for "time to study the NIE," and that the EU FMs will adopt GAERC conclusions on Iran along the lines of the November GAERC - expressing concern about Iran not meeting its UNSC obligations. Considering the sensitivity of this topic and its links to Missile Defense, Balek noted that the NIE has not changed the GOCR position on Iran or MD.

Kosovo - EU Still Working on Its Own Position

13. (SBU) Balek expects the EU FMs will discuss Kosovo and the implications for the broader Western Balkans at the GAERC. He commented that they also are likely to try to hammer out the details of an EU ESDP mission since the EU does not expect the Kosovars to make an unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) prior to the end of the orthodox Christmas season in early January. Balek's first concern, however, is not how the EU will handle recognition of an eventual UDI (likely to be discussed at an extraordinary GAERC and then left to individual member states in his opinion), but rather whether the EU will be able to rapidly come to consensus on the ESDP mission. When all is said and done, Balek anticipates that this will come together, but that it will require quite a bit of arm twisting of reluctant EU member states.

Israel - EU Mood Shift

14. (SBU) While Balek had very little that he wanted to add to our points on the Israel-Palestinian Peace Process, he did flag for our attention that the Annapolis conference provided a bit of an impetus for the EU to evaluate its position with

respect to Israel. He indicated that there has been a bit of a "mood shift" within the EU and that there is interest in exploring strengthening EU-Israeli relations in such possible areas as access to certain EU programs or EU internal markets. Balek noted that he could not be more specific since this is still such a recent development. Balek was also very clear to caution that the USG should refrain from any "bold expressions" encouraging the EU to expand economic cooperation with Israel since this almost certainly would not go over well with certain EU member states reluctant to make changes to the current relationship.

Burma - Give Gambari Time

15. (SBU) According to the Czechs, the EU does not plan to release any conclusions on Burma at this GAERC, nor is Balek aware of any plan for the EU FMs to discuss expanding existing EU sanctions to include financial sectors. The EU FMs will discuss the topic generally and their concerns about the regime's lack of positive action, but the general sentiment, according to Balek, is that UNSYG special advisor Gambari needs more time to negotiate before the EU takes additional steps.

Chad - Support, but Minimal

16. (SBU) Balek noted that the EU FMs will discuss the preparations for the EUFOR Chad-RCA mission. He noted that they have already had several planning conferences, and yet they are still short of personnel, equipment and financing. Since the EU has made a commitment to undertake this mission, there will be quite a lot of pressure on leading EU member states to address the shortfalls. The Czech Republic has

PRAGUE 00001283 002 OF 002

committed three people to the EUFOR Chad-RCA mission, but does not plan to offer any additional support at this time. They are considering providing special forces, however, only after the first rotation is completed in six months time (this would consist of approximately 100 SOF personnel who are also being considered for deployment to Afghanistan).

European Neighborhood Policy - Mixed Progress

17. (SBU) The EU FMs will discuss the progress reports of the EU's Eastern Neighbors' implementation of individual action plans, which the EU Secretariat has prepared. Since the Czech plan to focus on ENP during their 2009 EU Presidency, they have been following the progress of these countries closely. With respect to Ukraine, Balek commented it has had some difficulties with implementing certain reforms (Note: He did not specify which). Moldova, however, appears to have made solid progress on many of its identified tasks, although there is still the sticky issue of Transnistria.
Grabner